

Wickerbottom was a librarian who had once been a schoolteacher. She had a great deal of knowledge about many things and was a lifelong scholar, apparently! Wilson looked forward to comparing notes with her.

Wigfrid was Wigfrid.

Everyone had fallen into a cozy silence now, the introductions over with, and the two newcomers' meagre belongings moved from their old camp to their new home. The fire was beginning to die out. Wilson rubbed at his eyes- he ought to stoke that up so the light wouldn't die overnight, then he could sleep... was there anything else he had to do first? He didn't think so. He'd helped Wigfrid set up her tent already- well- he'd shown her where to get the materials and she'd set up her own tent- and Wickerbottom point blank refused to have a tent. That ought to be it...

Wickerbottom cleared her throat. "My dears, there are matters we need to discuss."

"Oh?" Wilson mumbled. Not at length, he hoped. He was liable to pass out.

"Speak, elder!" Wigfrid yelled, and Wolfgang leaned closer.

"What are the origins of the portal? Why, after so long apart, is the world bringing us together?" Her glasses flashed in the firelight.

"Surely this is some important plan by the forces driving this world."

"Oh, er..." Wilson was quite suddenly wide awake. "I built that portal..."

All eyes were upon Wilson.

He looked at Wolfgang, who was blinking back at him in confusion.

"Did I not mention that?" Wilson asked weakly.

"You did not," said Wendy.

Wilson bit his lip. The truth was, everything had been so confusing and startling when people had appeared beneath the archway that he had completely forgotten to address how it had come to be there. All of them had, actually. But that sounded like an awfully big excuse. It just happened to be true and sound like a lie, it sounded like he was hiding something. Should he come up with an actual, more plausible lie?

"Well, dear," Wickerbottom prompted. "However did you manage such a thing?"

Ah. A change of subject! To a question he didn't really want to answer. Perhaps he could lie about this, possibly in addition to the other thing, and say it had all been his own idea... but such a thing was likely to be found out. Also what if the portal turned out to be obviously evil at a later date and he'd claimed it was all his own doing? That would backfire extremely.

"Well," said Wilson. "Maxwell sort of... convinced me to do it... after being freed..."

Wickerbottom leaned forward. "Aha! So that is his reason for walking among us in mortal form! He must have transported himself here to interact with us on a more personal level."

"Oh, no, that's not why."

"What other reason?"

He looked around the group, gnawing on the inside of his cheek. This was also quite tempting to lie about, but he shouldn't. And he couldn't think of a darn thing to say aside from the truth that would make sense at the moment anyway. "I let him out. I didn't mention that either?"

"You freed the magician?" Wigfrid yelled.

Just hours earlier, Wigfrid had knocked him unconscious and tied him up because she thought he was in cahoots with Maxwell. He did not want to look shifty! "I had my reasons!" Wilson cried. "I did what I had to do!"

Wigfrid looked very dramatic. "You loosed the evil upon our world!"

"Ahem. Rein yourself in, please," Wickerbottom said. "I believe this young man has a great deal of explaining to do."

The steel in her voice was unmistakeable.

Wilson wrung his hands. "Yes, the whole story," he said. "I came to this realm when Maxwell contacted me with the directions to build a mysterious machine. I'm sure all of you came here the same way..."

"Ahem. I did not," said Wickerbottom.

"Wait, how'd you get here, then?" Wilson asked. Could it have been his archway after all? Wickerbottom and Wigfrid had said they'd lived here on their own for a while too but- what if the portal transported through time as well as space?! Could this be his fault after all?!

"I sank into a deep, dark pool..." Wendy said.

"Please, dear. Your mysterious machine?"

Wilson was in a bit of a cold sweat. "Well it was a sort of door... and it had a lever... and lightbulbs... if you pull the switch it opens and shadowy hands pull you through. I built one and it brought me here..."

"Hmm. That would violate some fundamental laws of physics."

"Oh, not at all! It has to do with relativity, you see-" Wilson shook his head at himself. "But that's not important now. There was a door there and then... another one here..."

"Wolfgang saw funny mouth door once," said Wolfgang. "I punched it!"

"I came across a similar contraption," said Wigfrid. "I believed it to be a trick by our dark enemy so... I let it alone!"

"I too," said Wickerbottom, "encountered a door in this place that seemed quite unnatural. It seemed like a quite obvious trick to me as well..."

"I would go through it sometimes to die," said Wendy. "As a diversion."

Wes just shook his head.

Wilson laced his fingers together. "Yes... hm... it would have seemed to be an obvious trick..." His cheeks were warm. He was blushing. Because he sounded like an idiot. Because he had behaved like an idiot.

"I take it you went through, dear?"

"There wasn't any other way out of here," he said.

"Have tried boat?" Wolfgang asked.

Wilson squinted at him. This realm was not exitable via boat. Couldn't he sense that? Wolfgang wasn't usually sarcastic...

Wes was motioning for Wilson to continue his story.

Wilson cleared his throat. "Well, on the other side of that door was another world, in which Maxwell promised me that I would find him if I searched long enough..." He would not go into detail about how there had technically been five worlds and all that, it wasn't really important as far as he knew. "And I did find him."

He paused to collect his thoughts.

"Go on, dear," said Wickerbottom. He'd paused too long, apparently.

"I found him... trapped." A dark place, sheer cliffs on all sides. An incongruent jaunty melody, a fragment from another happier world, as if taunting them both... wasted limbs, the dead gaze of a ruined shell of a man.

"So I let him out," Wilson said.

Wendy studied him. "You found the dark genie of this world... and let him out of the bottle..."

Wilson nodded and chewed on a hangnail. "And none of you did?" This might disprove his theory that the events of the world below had been a charade repeated for many different people.

"Decidedly not!" Wigfrid declared.

Wendy and Wes shook their heads.

"Wolfgang would not do this thing," said Wolfgang.

"Certainly I did not," said Wickerbottom. "May I ask why you did?"

The eyes of a corpse. The stink of years- no, decades of suffering- and skin crumbling to dust!

And then Wilson had been the genie in the bottle, for how long, he did not know. And of course, it had turned out to be temporary, but he had not known that. All he'd known at the time was that Maxwell had been there for ages. Ages and ages...

No, he couldn't dwell on this.

Everyone looked... well, less than pleased with Wilson. Under the circumstances, Wilson would also be less than pleased with Wilson. In fact, Wilson WAS less than pleased with Wilson.

How could he explain himself?

"He was different," Wilson said from around a mouthful of thumbnail.

"Different?" Wickerbottom asked.

"He's not... the same thing that brought us here. I know how that sounds, but he isn't. He's only a man... a horrible, warped, evil old man... but he's not dangerous anymore. I'm sure he's not! I'm not in-league with him, though! I'm just saying..." He trailed off.

They were all staring him down. Wigfrid was scrutinizing him. Wendy was as impassive as ever. Wickerbottom rubbed her chin thoughtfully. Wolfgang- Wolfgang looked confused. A little hurt. Wilson could not meet his eyes.

"Have you ever caught a rat in a trap?" Wilson asked. "Have you caught one that wasn't quite dead? Did you leave it there?"

"I do not see what this means," said Wolfgang.

Wigfrid hushed him, watching Wilson intently.

"I'm- I'm sayin'," said Wilson. "Say there's a stray animal dying of cyanide poisoning on your front step. Do you sit there and watch it die in agony?!"

"Yes," said Wendy.

Wilson brought his fist down on the log next to him. "Well, I don't!
I wring its neck!"

Wickerbottom adjusted her glasses. "When you say you freed
Maxwell," she said, and then she did not continue.

"Oh, he's out there alive right now," said Wilson. "Wigfrid saw him
today."

"Aye," said Wigfrid.

"Ah, yes," said Wickerbottom.

"So he's alive!"

Wendy studied him. "So you did not kill him."

"Well I didn't wring his neck," said Wilson.

There was a brief silence.

Wes was the one who next 'spoke', tapping his own chest and
pointing at Wilson, then mimicking an invisible box. He acted out
someone opening the box with a key, and Wes coming out of it.

"A-ah. Very nice, dear," said Wickerbottom. She adjusted her
glasses and leaned forward. "Where, precisely, did you free Maxwell
from? You've stated that he was trapped. Where and how?"

"He was stuck in a chair."

"Stuck in a chair?"

"You know, bound to it by the wrists and ankles." He pointed to his own wrist, and as he did so noticed that there was still a faint mark on it from where Wigfrid's bindings had abraded his skin. She really had not tied him as tightly as all that; this was his own fault for worrying at the ropes so much.

Wickerbottom glanced at his wrists. "I see, dear. And this chair was?..."

"It was in its own sort of realm," said Wilson. "The portal to the challenge world had stuff in it to build another portal and it took me to the chair world. There wasn't much else there but Maxwell and his chair."

"And you untied him?"

"Not exactly... it was a complicated restraining device of some sort. I had to unlock it. The key was fairly close by..." He fiddled at the cuff of his sleeve. "I don't really understand much about it myself, I'm afraid. If you want real information, we're going to have to track down Maxwell and ask him. I will warn you that he won't be very forthcoming, I've tried to interrogate him myself."

"I understand, Mr. Higgsbury. I believe I can make that stubborn boy see reason!"

Boy? Maxwell was old as dirt.

A smile played about Wickerbottom's lips. "And if he won't see reason, he may see sense in Mr. Wolfgang's impressively sized fists, oho!"

Wolfgang nodded. "I know how to make man talk."

Wigfrid grinned. "As do I."

"Yes indeed you do!" Wickerbottom leaned back, forcing her face to look calm and composed. "But- ahem- it shouldn't come to that."

"He didn't see a whole lot of sense in my fists," Wilson lamented, looking down at hands that were a third the size of Wolfgang's, at most.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh. Well, when Maxwell first contacted me I was... not happy to see him."

"This story seems to change a bit in a myriad of small ways as you tell it," Wendy said.

Wilson ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm a scientist, not a story-teller."

"You seem to find this all rather difficult to discuss," Wickerbottom observed.

"It wasn't a good time." Inwardly he seethed at himself. He wasn't such a fragile creature that he couldn't discuss the past, surely. The others were watching him, and saw him being uncooperative, and who knew what they thought of his motives? What would he think, if they were dodging the truth like this? He had to get ahold of himself. "The chair Maxwell was in was composed of living shadows," he said. "Like the ones that sometimes attack- you've seen them, haven't you? One is like a large beetle?..."

"Yes, indeed. You say this chair was alive?"

"Yes. The restraints actively resisted any struggle. If one struggled too much new restraints would form enveloping the torso and restricting motion even further."

"Fascinating."

Wigfrid nodded. "A chair of evil!"

"Like a cocoon of hateful slime." Wilson tapped his fingertips together. "Or perhaps a straightjacket... ah. Hrm." He closed his eyes for a moment. The gazes of the others lingered on him. "I got put in the chair after I let him go."

"Really!"

"For a while. I don't know how long. And then a lady showed up and let me out. I blacked out and woke up here after that. I don't know who she was or how to find her. I'm not sure she was... human."

"So," said Wickerbottom. "Your story is that you went through a portal that looked quite similar to the one that brought you here. Within the portal you found a world much like this one. After exploring it, you found your way to another realm, much smaller, that contained Maxwell trapped in a chair of ectoplasm, and little else. You freed him, believing him to be suffering undeservedly, and at this point you were confined to the device in his stead. After some time, a woman unknown to you came along and freed you. You lost consciousness and found yourself in the world we are in now. Maxwell was there too. After initial strife and even an attempt to do him physical harm, he helped you to build the portal that is gathering all of us together."

"Yes," said Wilson. "Yes, that's it..."

He felt rather drained.

"I see," she said. "Yes, it is imperative that we speak to Maxwell. Did being imprisoned in this ectoplasmic throne change you?"

"No. No, I'm the same as always!"

"I'm not accusing you, dear," said Ms. Wickerbottom. "Why, young man, it sounds you've been caught up in the machinations of shadowy entities beyond human understanding! I am merely concerned that these entities had an opportunity to corrupt you."

"Oh I don't think so!"

Wolfgang peered at him. "Tiny man is sweating. Fire is too hot?"

"No, I'm perfectly fine!" Wilson pressed the back of his hand to his mouth and stared into the fire.

Wes patted him on the back.

"We have overtaxed our scientist's mind," Wendy said impassively.

"I don't believe there's anything more we need from you at the moment, dear. Perhaps you ought to go rest," Wickerbottom suggested.

"No, I-" He stopped, putting his hand back to his mouth.

"We all should. It's quite dark," said Wickerbottom.

"Sleep well tonight, fight well tomorrow." Wigfrid got to her feet.

"Good night, my dear allies."

"Good night!" Wilson yammered.

Everyone else cleared off until it was just him and Wickerbottom.

She looked back at him.

"Do you need anything?" he babbled.

"No, dear. Aren't you tired?"

"Yes."

"Well then, don't stay up on my account."

Wilson nodded but continued to sit where he was.

Wickerbottom peered at him over her glasses. Wilson suddenly had the very strong impression that he ought to do what she said- and right now. "Good night," he said.

"Good night," she said with an air of finality.

He crawled into his tent, but instead of lying down he pulled out his spare backpack.

Inside were all of the notes he'd taken on the island. Most of them were reproductions from memory at this point; he had lost his notes at every change of worlds. In fact many of the entries were reproductions from memory of reproductions from memory. At this point some of the earlier ones had been reduced to fragments like 'something about Beefalo- large size, alarming noises'.

Disappointing. Even for a dedicated scientist such as Wilson it was of course a bit difficult to keep up with research while also fighting tooth and nail for one's survival, but he still regretted the research that was lost.

The events with the other world and the nightmare throne were fairly recent, though, and he did have notes on them. Perhaps something here would prove useful? He did not think he'd told his story terribly well just now, and it would be nice to have something better to back it up with.

Here was a note!

The blackness was absolute, except when it wasn't. That blasted music! I wanted to kick that darn gramophone to pieces. I swear, I'll never own another one when I'm out of this place. And that woman... so lovely... yet so deadly! I'd like to go home now... and smash my gramophone...

These were the ravings of a lunatic! That was the opposite impression from what Wilson wanted to give!

He shoved the note deep down in his backpack and shook his head. He should be destroying the nonsensical ones, really, and not keeping them around. He would eventually. Here, what was this one?

The whole thing was pretty terrifying. I have devoted my life to the pursuit of knowledge and I used to be quite convinced that there was no such thing as bad or harmful knowledge, only truths some people are woefully unprepared for... for the first time I think I've found something that I was quite unprepared for myself.

That was the whole note. Wilson stuffed it away. There was no room for personal sentiment in science! He'd gotten really sloppy being all alone here for so long. Also, he'd never had cause to care about this before because he'd had access to a typewriter and was not in the habit of letter writing, but Wilson's handwriting was awful...

A slight noise from outside.

Wilson was pretty well acquainted with most of the predatory species on the island at this point and that didn't sound like any of them. It sounded more like his camp-mates moving around. He peeked out of the tent anyway, in case someone needed something.

He saw Wickerbottom over by Wolfgang's tent. They were speaking quietly to each other, too low for Wilson to hear. He saw Wolfgang nod, and Wickerbottom pulled out... a book? Where'd she get one of those?

Say- Maxwell had a book. He could tell even from here that Wickerbottom didn't have the same book- no aura of death and despair- but could the two books be related somehow? Should he ask? Mightn't they think he was interrupting if he asked? He could always ask in the morning-

Wickerbottom opened up her book and sleepiness hit Wilson with the aggressive force of a bolt between the eyes. He had just enough time to get into his tent and into a prone position before unconsciousness descended.

///

Morning light. Wilson rolled away from the entrance to the tent and tugged his blanket over his face. He would have to get up soon, of course, but not... just yet...

Something was nagging at the back of his mind. An image of Wickerbottom holding a book that had somehow reached into his mind and turned off the lights by force! Something so unlikely would seem to be a dream and not a real event; however in this place nothing was too odd to discount. He would file the memory away for now.

He had always been a fairly resilient sort, if he did say so himself, and he already felt much improved from yesterday, but the tent was warm and the outside was cold. Winter was coming. Winter was coming soon. Very soon. Wickerbottom and Wigfrid had no warm hats. He'd have to make them warm hats.

He yanked on his waistcoat and stumbled into the brisk morning air. Everyone was arranged about the fire except for Wigfrid and Wolfgang. Wickerbottom was in the process of making her own hat. So that was covered. Wilson considered going back to bed, but Wes was already waving to him.

"Good morning," Wilson mumbled, and just stood there, uncertain of whether to take his seat at the fire or not.

"Good morning. Do sit." Wickerbottom beckoned him forward.

Wilson took his seat by the fire, clasping his hands between his knees and watching the heart of the flames.

"Would you like some breakfast, dear?"

"Oh, don't worry about me... I'll make myself something..." He got up and headed for the food area.

Wickerbottom cleared her throat. Wilson turned his head. She was looking at Wendy, not him.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Higgsbury," Wendy said dolefully.

"Oh, good morning, Wendy! Please, call me Wilson."

"Ahem," said Wickerbottom. "Wendy and I are discussing her manners. It is not appropriate for her to address you by your Christian name."

"Oh?" He started some meatballs for himself. "But I'd prefer it. And we're not really in a usual situation..."

"Ah! That is why it is of the utmost importance for young Wendy to learn proper greetings and terms of address. Someday she will return to polite society, and the adjustment will be difficult enough if she has learned to be polite."

"Hmm," said Wilson. "That's a very good point. However, I just asked her to call me by my given name, isn't it more impolite if she refuses to do that?"

Wickerbottom rubbed her chin thoughtfully. "Ah, yes... is it more polite to obey a rule when one has asked specifically to have it disregarded, or to continue to do what is regarded as proper?"

Wes feigned sleep behind her. Wilson made swatting motions at him.

Wickerbottom peered at him over her glasses. "Er, not you," said Wilson. "The mime was..."

Wes looked innocent and surprised.

Wilson tugged at his sideburns. "Never mind." He turned back to the crock pot, removing his food and sitting down in the circle with it. "Where, er... where are the others?"

"Ah," said Wickerbottom. "Miss Wigfrid desires to have more pelts before the commencement of winter, so she has gone out to hunt. Mr. Wolfgang chose to accompany her. He's quite keen on a hunt, you know!"

"Oh, I know."

He finished his meal and licked the sauce from his fingers. Wickerbottom eyed him disapprovingly.

"Well, I don't have a handkerchief," Wilson said, and wiped his hands on his pants.

"Ah... of course. I'll make you one, dear."

He hadn't exactly meant she should do that! "Er, thanks..." She had mentioned winter coming. He got up and went to the chest to check on the number of rocks inside.

Six thermal stones sat there, ready and waiting for use. Wilson blinked, closed the chest, and sat back down by the fire.

"Now, are you feeling better?" Wickerbottom asked him. "You've been fed and rested? You did not seem well last night."

"I do feel quite a lot better now, thank you."

"Excellent! Shall we embark?"

"Hm?" He looked at the others. They looked back at him expectantly.

"To find Maxwell and force him to answer our questions, of course," Wickerbottom said.

"Oh! Ah... yes. Why not?"

///

A chill was definitely setting into the air. Wilson tucked his hands into his pockets for warmth.

"I'm surprised you haven't sought out Maxwell before this," Wickerbottom said.

"We've been busy preparing for winter and getting enough food for everyone." Perhaps it was also a factor that he did not believe Maxwell would be a great deal of help and he did not particularly like to talk to him.

"Ah... yes, of course. You must be relieved to have more help."

"Mmhmm." He forced a smile. "I did run into him the other day, of course, that's when I ran into Wigfrid. He was at the portal then. We should start there maybe?"

"Quite reasonable," she said.

"I think Abigail would like to see Uncle again," said Wendy.

"Uncle?"

"He is our flesh and blood," said Wendy.

Oh so Maxwell hadn't only kidnapped a little girl, he'd kidnapped his own niece. Wilson very nearly said that his fists would like to see Maxwell again too but perhaps Wendy wouldn't care to hear that said about her uncle. "I see," he said instead.

"Hmm," said Ms. Wickerbottom. "Maxwell has family, then."

"I'm fairly certain he's human, or used to be," said Wilson.

"I see! Based on what?"

"I, er... he seems human? He definitely eats food."

"Hmm... indeed..."

"If he's her uncle he must be human."

"One would think," said Wickerbottom.

Two figures appeared on the horizon. Wilson froze where he stood. It was Wigfrid and Wolfgang. They drew closer. Wigfrid had a massive pile of animal pelts over her shoulder- Wilson saw rabbit, beefalo, and- merm? Yuck.

"Hello, peoples!" Wolfgang boomed. "We have had good fights!"

Wilson glanced him over for evidence of injuries and saw none. Wolfgang walked up to him and ruffled his hair. Wilson flinched away, blinking. People didn't usually reach out and grab his head.

"Hello, dears," said Wickerbottom. "We are searching for Maxwell, to force him to answer some things."

"Ha! Good!"

"Wolfgang," said Wigfrid, "I shall stow away my new furs and then perhaps we will set out to look for him as well! He cannot hide for long on this island. Two search parties will speed up our expedition!"

"Is good!" Wolfgang patted Wilson on the head- rather heavily- and said "Good luck, small peoples!"

Wigfrid gave Wickerbottom a sort of salute, and the two headed back to camp. Wes broke away from the group to follow them.

Wilson began to absent-mindedly rearrange his hair. Wolfgang had almost certainly messed it up... but he'd done so affectionately, hadn't he? Wilson had not been on the receiving end of a lot of physical affection in his life and especially not from other men but ruffling someone's hair was a friendly thing to do, wasn't it? Not something one did to people one thought to be traitors, backstabbers, liars, that sort of thing?

Of course Wilson was terribly biased about this and did not want to be disliked.

///

Maxwell was not conveniently at the portal today. Wilson circled the pillars and eyed the vines. "I didn't quite create this," he said. "That... fellow and I made something rather different and it was remade after by an unknown force."

"Ah," said Ms. Wickerbottom.

"You- you know," Wilson said, looking at the portal, "I know I sound... less than, er... less than..."

"Trustworthy?" Wendy suggested. "Sane? Lucid?"

"Ah..."

"I doubt anyone thinks you a liar," said Wendy.

"Do you think we don't trust you?" Ms. Wickerbottom asked.

Wilson tapped at the marble with his fingernails. "I know we've only just met and I seem to have a lot of... unusual stories to tell."

"There, there. It's an unusual place. Where else do you believe Maxwell is likely to go?"

"Me?"

"You seem to have had the most contact with him out of all of us."

"Oh," said Wilson. He glanced at Wendy, almost suggesting that she might know him better, since he was her uncle- but absolutely not! This was Wilson's chance to prove that he was trustworthy and a valuable member of the group. He would not fob things off on a child.

He paced back and forth, frowning. What was unfortunate was that he had no idea where Maxwell might have gone. He really didn't know the man very well... but he had noticed a pattern of behavior.

"Hmm. He's not very good at surviving, so he's probably looking for easy food sources like berries and carrots. We ought to check the meadows that haven't been harvested lately."

"Ah, yes. Of course. Lead the way. You have been on this particular island longer than the rest of us."

"Right... you know, I should make the rest of you maps... well, I think there's a likely candidate this way."

He set off at a brisk pace. Wendy and Wickerbottom had no trouble keeping up with him. His legs were pretty short. And still a bit sore, but recovering.

Though brisk, the day was still pleasant. Golden sunlight lit up the meadow. Wilson might find this enjoyable if he were the sort to enjoy being outside.

"Careful of the bees," he said.

"Yes, I see them," said Wickerbottom.

It occurred to Wilson at this point that he actually had no proof that Maxwell was the one taking the berries. It seemed unlikely for Wickerbottom or Wigfrid to have been the one, but couldn't there, perhaps, be other undiscovered people hanging around? His entire hypothesis was built on assumptions and not measurable data!

"You don't look well, dear," Wickerbottom said.

"Oh, I usually don't! It's nothing! Ah-" He looked about the meadow. "Those bushes seem to be bare." He headed over to them and scouted about the area for any sign of footprints or anything.

A butterfly floated past. He absentmindedly caught it in his hands and stripped off the wings.

Wendy was watching this.

"You've killed something innocent," she said.

"Oh, the wings are good for you."

"You are a violent man, scientist."

Wilson could not think of a reply. He quietly ate the butterfly wings- they tingled pleasantly on his tongue and instantly gave him a slight feeling of well-being.

Wendy eyed the butterflies flitting around with a rather predatory air, and Wilson wondered if he were being a poor role model.

Wickerbottom called out: "My, what's this?"

She'd found the huge beehive. Wilson walked up to her, footsteps padding softly on the grass. "That?" he said. "It's a really big beehive. It's... strange, I guess? Perhaps there's an unusually large bee colony living in it."

"Hmm," said Wickerbottom. "In this odd realm I don't believe anything ought to be discounted. Perhaps the most likely explanation for this large nest of *Apis mellifera* is that there are many insects inside, but it's worthy of investigation, isn't it?"

It was a big beehive. "Of course. I doubt Maxwell's in there, though." Although a vindictive part of Wilson sort of thought it would be nice if Maxwell WAS inside a giant beehive.

So nothing ought to be discounted. He was inclined to agree. Now would be a logical time to ask her about the book, but it was difficult for him to find the words. One didn't just walk up to someone and say 'Hey, did you make me pass out by opening a book?' But it would be a lot less weird if he just asked if she had a book with her. He could do that.

He opened his mouth to speak, but before he could there was another voice behind them. Quiet and thin, yet it froze him where he stood-

"Abigail is here."